



**T ★ A ★ P ★ S**

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## **Surviving Families**

### **DOD Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide Panel Discussion**

### **October 8, 2009**

#### **Roxine Alegria (Arizona)**

**Family Member:** Husband, 12/2/2007

**Service Branch:** Army

Roxine is the widow of US Army Specialist Alfonso Alegria, who took his own life in December 2007. Alfonso served for five years in the US Army & was deployed to Iraq twice. He was a proud and dedicated soldier. He loved the ocean and travel. His passion was to write poetry & relax to music. Alfonso left active duty military service in February 2007. He shot himself in the living room of the home he shared with Roxine. He is survived by his parents, Alfonso and Carolina Alegria, his brother, Daniel Alegria and his sister, Rebecca Alegria.

#### **Mike Bowman (Illinois)**

**Family Member:** Son, 11/24/2005

**Service Branch:** Army National Guard

Mike is the father of Timothy Noble Bowman, age 23, took his own life on Thanksgiving morning in 2005. Tim was a decorated member of the Illinois National Guard and was part of F-202 ADA Battery from Galva. They departed from home in October of 2003 for 6 months of intensive training at Fort Hood and Fort Polk. On Tim's 22nd birthday, March 4, 2004 Foxtrot left for Iraq where they were stationed at Camp Victory. Their tour took them directly into combat including 4 months on "the most dangerous road in the world", the highway from the airport to the Green Zone in Baghdad. They moved up to Taji, Iraq later in their tour and finally returned home in March of 2005. When they hit the states they were put through 2 weeks of debriefings and evaluations before returning home to their families in Illinois in March 19th. After that date, says Bowman, the 117 soldiers left in Foxtrot that went through some of the most dangerous work in Iraq received no help from the Army to help them readjust to civilian life.

#### **Ed Colley (California)**

**Family Member:** Son, 5/16/2007

**Service Branch:** Army

Ed is the father of US Army Specialist Stephen Colley, who took his own life at age 22. Stephen was one of six Colley children, and he worked as a helicopter mechanic with the military. Several of the Colley children have served in the military. Stephen and his oldest brother, Alan, were deployed to different parts of Iraq within days of each other. Following his Iraq deployment when Stephen returned to Fort Hood, Texas - where he lived with Laura - Stephen was troubled. He felt that he could not get the psychological help he needed from the military for fear it would jeopardize his future career in the army, his father said. "The (army) wants its soldiers to be mentally healthy, but it's very hard for the soldiers to get the help they need," he added.

**Mary Gallagher (New York)**

**Family Member:** Husband, 5/23/2006

**Service Branch:** Marine

Mary is the widow of US Marine Gunnery Sergeant James Gallagher. Just a month before he took his own life, she said her husband helped stop one of his own Marines from committing suicide. Mary believes that stigma about seeking mental health care played a role in keeping her husband from seeking help. Gunnery Sgt. James Gallagher hung himself in their garage at Camp Pendleton on May 23, 2006. After his return from Iraq - where more than 12 people in his unit were killed, including the commanding officer - "Jim never spoke of anything," she said. When she tried to talk about his behavioral changes - sleeping more, not showering - "he told me, 'I'm a gunny. I'm fine.'" Mary and James have three children.

**Michael Hartig (Germany)**

**Family Member:** Brother, 6/11/2009

**Service Branch:** Army

Michael is the brother of Second Lt. David J. Hartig who took his own life on June 11, 2009 in Wiesbaden, Germany. Described as persistent and tenacious. All communications from him prior to his death indicate that the stress in his life originated from the Army. His mother, Lynea Hartig, said, "My son joined the Army after graduating from the University of Michigan. He excelled in infantry basic training. David scored at the top of his Officer Candidate School class and received numerous awards in graduating from adjutant general training. Despite this level of achievement, he expressed to his family that he felt unprepared for and overwhelmed by his work; David told us about the lack of mentoring and job overlap that would have made his first assignment more manageable. Our frustration is furthered by his testimony of an Army culture lacking logic and an Army leadership lacking consistency. As David said in one of his final e-mails: "Challenging is not holding someone responsible for things they didn't know about or aren't equipped to take care of." It is a detriment to our military if it cannot find a place for capable, thoughtful individuals like David. David's death is, to us, an irreparable loss. But our sorrow is only increased by the thought of another soldier losing his or her life in this needless manner."

**Anne Lente (New Mexico)**

**Family Member:** Husband, 12/6/2003

**Service Branch:** Marine Reserves

Anne is the widow of US Marine Lance Corporal Jay Lente, who took his own life in 2003 after returning from a combat deployment to Iraq. He left behind children Alana, Roslynn, Ryan, and Scott. He also served as a police officer in their community.

**Charles McKinney (Texas)****Family Member:** Son, 7/11/2007**Service Branch:** US Army

Charles is the father of First Sgt. Jeffrey "Top" R. McKinney, 40, of Garland, Texas, who died July 11, 2007 in Adhamiyah, Iraq, of injuries suffered from a non-combat related incident. While out in Iraq on a meet-and-greet patrol, McKinney stepped out of his Humvee and yelled, "F--- this!" He raised the barrel of his M4 to his chin and squeezed off one shot. The first sergeant - who sang Sesame Street songs to his men and teased them just enough to make them feel like family - left his soldiers shattered. At first, they scrambled to find the sniper who they believed must have fired the shot. When they realized the truth, they wondered how "Top" could have deserted them. "That's not First Sergeant McKinney," his driver, Spc. Anthony Seashore, who witnessed his death, later told investigators. "Never." His family also felt blindsided. McKinney had no history of mental health issues. But as his parents and wife accumulated documentation from the investigation into McKinney's death, the case became clearer. The leadership demands of an Army at war, the untold emotional and physical injuries of combat and the unrealistic stoicism of a dedicated soldier all collided in tragedy. McKinney had been on the scene after a 500-pound bomb left five of his soldiers and an Iraqi interpreter dead; he was in a vehicle when another bomb blew up just two feet away, almost killing him and his men; he had consoled a soldier who lost a leg to a roadside bomb. And he had stopped eating, stopped sleeping and become convinced he was not doing enough to keep his soldiers safe. He left behind his wife Chrissi and two sons.

**Colonel George Patrin (California)****Family Member:** Son, 4/7/2009**Service Branch:** His son did not serve in the military

Colonel George Patrin is a doctor serving with the military and the father of Andrew Hillner Patrin, who took his own life in April 2009 just days before his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday with a newly-purchased shotgun in a suburb of San Antonio. A series of despondent e-mails to his parents launched them on a frantic effort to contact him. Despite cooperation from Monterey police and those in Schertz, Texas, where the death occurred, Patrin said he and his wife found themselves bogged down in the bureaucratic inertia of the San Antonio Police Department and the privacy policies of Sprint. The couple and assisting police pleaded with Sprint to tell them where their son was calling from on his cell phone. "We had cell phone contact with Andrew at 3a.m. the day he committed suicide," Patrin said. "I called Sprint twice, six hours apart, as we were contacted by Andrew, basically crying out for help. "They told me to 'get the police department to get a court order.'" The Monterey Police Department, he said, finally got Sprint to cooperate at 2p.m. April 7. By then it was too late. The Patrins have become advocates for a national version of "Brandon's Law," first enacted in Minnesota and now in force in 10 states. Named for Brandon Swanson, 19, who vanished near Taunton, Minn., the bill expanded the state's missing children's law to include adults who go missing under dangerous circumstances, and requires law enforcement to take a missing person's



**Kim Ruocco (Massachusetts)**

**Family Member:** Husband, 2/7/2005

**Service Branch:** Marine

Kim is the widow of US Marine Maj. John Ruocco, 40, who returned from Iraq in 2004 numb and depressed. He lost weight, had nightmares, and seemed distracted and withdrawn from his two young sons, Joey and Billy. Three months after he returned home from war, he promised Kim one night he would get help. But by the next morning, he was dead. The Cobra helicopter pilot hung himself in February 2005. He was based at Camp Pendleton, California and was scheduled to redeploy to Iraq in a few weeks. Kim has a master's degree in social work and said she "never saw it coming." She said he knew he was a role model for the young Marines he led in battle, and worried about the ramifications of seeking mental health help personally and professionally. "He felt like that was the end of everything for him. He felt like his Marines would, you know, be let down." She now focuses on raising their sons, Joey and Billy, and helps other faced with the suicide of a loved one in the Armed Forces by coordinating programs with TAPS.

**Connie Scott**

**Family Member:** Son, 1/8/2007

**Service Branch:** Army

Connie Scott is the surviving mother of US Army Private First Class Brian Williams, who took his own life in early 2007. She will never know exactly what Brian saw in the days before he left Iraq to come home on leave in December 2006. But the day before he was supposed to return to Iraq, the 19-year-old killed himself in their garage. "If only Brian could have reached out to someone who understood his pain," she said. "He was sent home in a critical state without a support group," she said. "He had never been exposed to death before. I think he would've been OK if he hadn't come home on leave ... if he'd had the support of his Army buddies." Williams' troubled mental state was worsened by an e-mail from his fiancée that he received at the airport while waiting to leave Iraq, in which she broke off their engagement because she had found someone else. "He couldn't sleep or eat and was withdrawn," she said. "We walked on eggshells, not knowing what to say or what not to say. There was no Army base near me. I had no one to call. I didn't know what to do."